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1967/07/03

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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July 10, 1967

Note to Governor Harriman:

This is what I gave Bob McNamara and Nick before they left. See what you think. As you see, I now feel negative in injecting the Canadian proposal, but perhaps you feel differently.

WPB.
William P. Bundy

Attachment:

Chet
Copy of 7/3/67 memo to Secy. McNamara.

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Per
DSS Review 3-20-98
By BLS/PK LC Date 4-7-98

July 3, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY MCNAMARA:

Subject: Thoughts on Viet-Nam.

Amplifying our phone conversation, I attach my memorandum to the Secretary on the possible conclave in Hanoi and whether we can take advantage of it. I also attach an earlier memorandum, after our last conversation. Thirdly, I attach an analysis of the negotiating issues, which John McNaughton saw in draft but which you may not have seen.

Let me sum up some highly tentative thoughts on Hanoi's behavior in the last 10 months. I start with the assumption that the Polish episode of early December was a fraud on the part of the Poles, and we now have Radvanyi with a clear reading that Hanoi was dug in as of late November, as well as pretty clear evidence that Hanoi did not authorize the Poles to do anything.

From this zero point we move to Hanoi's behavior from December through early February. We laid off the 10-mile circle and they were prepared to enter into contacts in Moscow. Secondly, they initiated the "stop bombing for talks" ploy, and we now know from an NLF senior lady defector that this caused a tremor in the southern ranks. The Moscow talks led nowhere and of course finally culminated in the President's letter of February 8, possibly with the Kossygin message at the end of that week. Hanoi gave nothing in Moscow, but it at least listened.

On the one hand, the Moscow contacts and the bombing/talks ploy may have been a feeler to see if our position had any "give" and a tactical appealing to world opinion, respectively. On the other hand, it is conceivable that they felt themselves under real pressure in the December-January period. One can only have a hypothesis.

If the latter possibility is to have any plausibility,

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one must ask what factor was then present that had not been there before. And there is at least one obvious candidate, in the fact that the Chinese situation had spread into the factories and the countryside at just this time and may well have caused serious concern that it would really boil over. This concern would have started in late December and would have continued through most of January. It could well have been much eased by the January 25 announcement by Mao that he was calling out the army. We at first thought this meant the situation was going to get still worse, but it became clear to us by mid-February that the army was designed to bring things back under some sort of control. To Hanoi with its finger closer on the Chinese pulse, the significance of the injection of the army may have been immediately clear. In other words, they may well have known by the time of the President's letter that the Chinese situation was in fact going to cool off for a while.

You then have Ho's reply to the President's letter, and above all the refusal of further contacts. The letter itself was not a hardening, much less a move in the direction of Peking, since Peking had always detested the bombing/talks gambit repeated in Ho's letter. But the refusal of contact must suggest that Hanoi at about this time made a considered decision, probably at Central Committee level, that it was going to dig in and try a spring offensive in the north and center.

There followed two more refusals to have contact in Moscow, and clear evidence that the Soviets believed Hanoi was dug in and that they, the Soviets, had no influence. And on March 21 Hanoi released the letters, telling its own people how tough it had been, but also releasing the reference in the President's letter to the fact that "contacts" had taken place. This permitted us to let the Moscow contacts become known, but above all it told the faithful in both North and South Viet-Nam that the Politburo had permitted contacts and had not told the faithful about them when they were taking place. In other words, Hanoi was being tough, but it was also signaling to its own people that there could be moves.

Then came the hard bombing attacks of April and May and

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the stepped-up offensive in the North up by the DMZ. Here we face an unknown--whether the results of this offensive to date have met Hanoi's expectations, or the reverse, and in what degree. As you say, they have been badly chewed up, but they may also have been learning. I attach Denis Warner's article in The Reporter, which strikes me as an excellent interpretive account of the northern offensive, well worth using as a peg to get the interpretations of Westy, Abrams & Co. H-7

The effect of the bombing is equally uncertain, but you have at least some indications that it hurt, both materially and in terms of morale. But the opposite is possible--that the bombing seemed to Hanoi to be a major US effort, and that they stood up to it and inflicted major losses on us. Valued USSR

Meanwhile, the political situation in Saigon turned for the worse from our standpoint, and for the better from Hanoi's. They have made very shrewd comments on where Ky's behavior in June was leading us, and they must have been encouraged by the picture. I attach an article by Shackford, quoting what Hanoi was saying as recently as last week. H-7

At any rate, the three objective variables in the past three months were the northern offensive, the bombing, and the political situation in Saigon. The latter in particular must still look fairly hopeful to Hanoi, and my objective judgment would have been that it outweighed any minus effect, from their standpoint, of the bombing and the at least limited success of the northern offensive.

Hence, I for one would not have expected any signs of flexibility in Hanoi in the past five weeks. Yet, as my memorandum to the Secretary argues, there has been at least some mood music in a more flexible direction.

Now, one draws back to an over-all timetable. Let us assume that Hanoi was a little worried in December and January, but reassured and tough in February, probably through a Central Committee decision, and with the change in the Chinese picture a significant factor. What of the Chinese

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situation now? If Hanoi reads it as we do, I would think that they must be increasingly concerned. Developments have never looked like going out of control, as they did in December and January, but the trend line is steadily in the direction of more disorder and disruption, less cohesion of any sort, and in fact a general coming apart of the whole Mainland structure, possibly including even the army. I do not mean to exaggerate. This is a slow process, but the signs are all in a downward direction. Hong Kong and Burma are manifestations of a resulting edginess and lack of control, and they have--parenthetically--the effect of making our calculations on Chinese action toward Viet-Nam more uncertain. I would be more worried than in the past at any change in our military actions that appeared to threaten China or the regime in North Viet-Nam.

But this by the way. In terms of this analysis, the point is that Hanoi (which has attacked Mao-ism pretty strongly three weeks ago) must feel it has a pretty unreliable supporter in Peking, and may even be worried that disorder could reach the point of impairing its vital supply line, at some time in the future. So this is a fourth "X factor" that cannot be accurately assessed, but that I would put in the minus column from Hanoi's standpoint.

Against all these is the fifth major factor--Hanoi's view of US ~~xxxx~~ support for the war. Here again things cut both ways. There are many indications that they do not take our "doves" too seriously under present circumstances, and they may well have been sharply disappointed that our bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong did not create a greater outcry both in the US and abroad. On the other hand, the evidence suggests--and I for one strongly believe--that they carry a very strong conviction that our 1968 elections could change our policy or at the least result in a drastic weakening of our cohesion. And this factor comes more and more into play--as an inducement for them to hang on--as our 1968 elections come closer.

If one assumes that these are the factors now being debated in the obvious Hanoi conclave, it seems to me most unlikely--still--that they would lead Hanoi to make a serious move toward peace this summer. The Saigon political picture alone is so

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uncertain that they would surely hang on to see how this comes out--although I would not exclude their trying to design some peace ploy that they think would be disruptive in South Vietnamese politics.

In short, the most that Hanoi might decide to do now would be something tactical in the "negotiating" area. But it probably has to decide also whether to keep up its military offensive and how it can cope with the bombing. And it probably is reassured--a sixth factor that I should have included earlier--by pretty open-ended Soviet undertakings of necessary aid.

But the next point is that Hanoi may well be looking to the next conclave after this one. By late this fall, we may have a more appealing and somewhat more effective Saigon government. We may have really blunted their military offensive. We may have kept them under continued severe strain through the bombing. And the US elections would still be far enough off so that the argument for hanging on till that time would be less appealing than it may become by the spring of 1968.

Obviously, this is an optimistic set of things that may happen. But our objective should be to maximize the chances. I do not think that they blinked in December and January, or that they are likely to blink in their present conclave. But I do think they twitched in December and January and that the present conclave will be in an atmosphere of worry.

Does this argue for a major decision to step up our action? In my judgment it does not. South Vietnamese problems, including the elections and ARVN performance above all, are by far the greatest single element both in the situation and in what are Hanoi's calculations on it. Of course we must do all that is necessary to meet Hanoi's military offensive and to maintain steady grinding military pressure. But any early announcement of major increases in our action could have a negative effect on the key South Vietnamese ~~problems~~ factors.

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Rather, I think we should maintain the same basic pattern of action that we are now pursuing. It is, or can be made, hard enough to keep the tide moving, while at the same time it avoids drastic measures that might strike Hanoi as evidence of impatience and that might upset the steady, and to us favorable, deterioration in the Chinese situation or--at worst--trigger some Chinese action.

Finally, I have put this in the context of a concededly optimistic view. But I think also that if one takes a more pessimistic view--discarding the points I have cited as purely indicators of greater sophistication in Hanoi's diplomatic handling (and this is true in some degree in any event)--the course of action, on a game theory analysis, still comes out the same. Indeed, if Hanoi is dug in and has been all along, it is still less likely that any drastic change in our military pattern will affect them. What we need to do--on any hypothesis--is to set a firm and steady course that will persuade them that we mean business for as long as it takes. 3

One final word. In terms of our present negotiating actions, I do not believe the Canadian proposal could practicably be injected at this point in any event. And on reflection I am inclined to think that a Hanoi conclave would interpret it as a sign of real weakening, so that it might even stiffen them. I think the kind of message already conveyed by Peli--which was in essence what we were saying for several months--has done about as much as we could expect to do to influence Hanoi's deliberations and given them something to chew on. If they do come back seriously, I think it will be in the direction of "preliminary conversations" to discuss the outlines of a final settlement. I attach as my last offering the CIA report from the press man in Paris. This man foreshadowed the bombing talks gambit, and his conversations over a long period have been of more than routine interest. I have no idea what he means by "a 10-year truce with each side staying within its own positions"; within South Viet-Nam, that would plainly be impracticable. But it could have a quite different meaning if it refers to both Viet-Nams. 11-7

I am of course giving a copy of this to Nick Katzenbach,

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as one man's analysis.

William P. Bundy

Attachments:

- A - 6/30/67 memo to the Secretary
- B - 5/1/67 memo to the Under Secretary
- C - Negotiating Analysis.
- D - Denis Warner article
- E - Shackford Article
- F - CIA Paris cable, 6/27/67.

Cc: Mr. Katzenbach.

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